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ABSTRACT

This article briefly describes a conference of Chinese and American women held to discuss womens' issues and promote mutual understanding between the two groups. The cultural exchange of information at the conference focused on discussion of the All China Womens' Federation (ACWF); the roles of women in China and the United States in the areas of health, education, employment, and the family; and miscellaneous womens' issues. Specifically discussed were: the current campaign of the ACWF to mobilize and organize women to promote China's modernization; current medical issues in the United States such as teenage pregnancy, smoking, and heart disease; China's grassroots health care outreach; the contemporary discriminatory practices against women in U.S. education today; the problem of getting women into high-paying powerful jobs in the United States; the enormous increase in women in the labor force in China since 1949; the problem of divorced women who are displaced homemakers in the United States; and the Chinese view that all social forces must contrive to preserve marriage. Miscellaneous issues such as ERA, Social Security, and pension plans in the United States were also considered. (NE)

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WINGSPREAD brief

1979

A WINGSPREAD CONFERENCE BRIEF IN TEXT AND PHOTOGRAPHS

A Wingspread Conference Brief in Text and Photographs

CHINESE AND AMERICAN WOMEN: ISSUES OF MUTUAL CONCERN

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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

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Eleven women comprising the first delegation of women from the People's Republic of China (PRC) and twelve American women came together for two days in May, 1979, at Wingspread for a conference sponsored by the National Committee on United States-China Relations in cooperation with The Johnson Foundation. One Chinese delegate described the outcome of the discussions by saying, "We have been apart for thirty years. We came here to seek friendship and understanding. Our problems and solutions are very different, but I have come to understand Americans much better, so there is a common ground for our friendship." An American participant reported, "I found the experience stimulating and informative. It gave me an opportunity to gain a number of new insights about China in general and the status of women in particular. Meeting in an informal setting, dining together and being able to talk on a one-to-one basis or in very small groups was much more rewarding than attending a more conventional meeting or conference."

The idea for this conference was conceived by Jan Berris, Program Director of the National Committee on United States-China Relations, and Rita Goodman, Vice President-Area Programs, The Johnson Foundation, during a boat trip down the Yangtze River in China last December. The delegation's trip was the first Chinese tour devoted specifically to the concerns of women and the Wingspread Conference the first time that a group of Chinese and American women had met in the United States for a prolonged period of discussion with an agreed-upon agenda. This historic conference between the women of two vastly different cultures aimed not for consensus but rather for increased mutual understanding.

To establish the informal and human dimensions of the conference, the first plenary session began with each participant introducing herself to the group in terms of her own history, work and family. This process illuminated some of the similarities and differences between the two groups of discussants.

- All were activists, with long records of involvement and achievement in the affairs of their particular societies and their professions. Most were well-educated women. Most important, interest and curiosity on both sides combined with feelings of identification based on gender and on perceived gender-related similarities, resulting in a degree of emotional intensity and a

Muriel Tuteur, Director, Amalgamated Day Care Center; Coalition of Labor Union Women; Wang Jinfeng, Reporter, *People's Daily*; Cai Dan Zuo Ma, Deputy Director, Bureau of Culture, Tibetan Autonomous Region; Huang Ganying, Delegation Leader; Vice Chairperson, All China Women's Federation; Florence Howe, Professor of Humanities, State University of New York/College at Old Westbury; Anne Firor Scott, Professor of History, Duke University.

perceptual framework that is unlikely to be typical of other cultural exchanges. The fact that these were women together gave the meeting a distinctive unity difficult to achieve under other circumstances.

- The highly individualistic Americans reported diverse histories. Most had been married and had children. Several were now independent professional women, having been divorced or widowed. Some had been engaged in several different occupations. Most were critics of the role ascribed to women in American society and were working in various ways to improve the status of women. These women represented the choices and pluralism that is America. Their freedom to choose and their commitment to change for women was deeply rooted in the relative stability and affluence of the United States in recent times.

- In contrast, all the Chinese women were married and had families. Only one was a widow. Many had grown children living at home, as well as parents, making three-generation households, a rarity in the United States. It was the ideological framework of their lives that distinguished the Chinese women from the Americans. All were born before the founding of the PRC in 1949 and therefore have lived through a broad range of political and social changes. Many had joined the communist or leftist forces (army, guerrillas, youth movement) in the pre-1949 period, some even in the 1930s. Professionally, most delegation members appeared to have worked in the same institutions for 20-30 years. Whether a research scientist, a factory worker, a former "serf", or an official of the All China Women's Federation (ACWF), these women seemed single-minded in their commitment to the success of their government and the modernization of their nation. Out of the instability and economic uncertainty of their individual and collective pasts, and in line with many traditional cultural values, they had come to believe in the favorable benefits of conformity rather than self-determination, the primacy of the state's interest rather than the individual's, and the central ordering of thought, behavior and public services.

THE ALL CHINA WOMEN'S FEDERATION (ACWF)

The fact that the delegation could make this trip is a measure of the improvement in the status of women in the PRC. The delegation leader and a vice chairwoman of the ACWF, Huang Ganying, described the work of her organization. The ACWF, at present the sole national organization to focus on the needs and interests of women, was created out of the wide array of women's groups existing in China before 1949. "Women from all sectors of society, all nationalities, different occupations and religious beliefs can all become members," she said. "Our organization has a national leadership with divisions in the provinces and autonomous areas."

The Chinese women took great pride in the fact that one of the major accomplishments of the PRC was the guarantee of certain civil rights for women and children. Now the ACWF aims to assist the government in implementing these constitutional rights.

A current campaign of the ACWF is to mobilize and organize women to promote the nation's modernization. The problem of releasing women from household responsibilities for employment outside the home and the modernization of Chinese society are seen as closely interrelated: "The four modernizations (industry, science and technology, agriculture, defense) need women and women need the four modernizations." The need to place women in the labor force cannot be met until they are relieved from the twin burdens of homemaking and child care. While the ACWF works to raise the educational level of women through training classes and educational programs on television, it also hopes to modernize and socialize housework and to provide child care. The societal responsibility for child care is widely accepted in China because children are viewed as the future hope of the country rather than the private property of parents and consequently are regarded as the shared responsibility of parents, schools and society. At present, it is believed that day care services are insufficient to meet the needs of working women and the ACWF aims to train more workers for day care centers.

Following the initial plenary session the conferees broke into three groups to address the topics constituting the main focus of the Conference as planned in the original agenda. In each of these concurrent sessions, Americans gave their presentations first.

WOMEN AND HEALTH

- In her brief "Overview of the American Health Care System," Julia Lear, Georgetown University Medical School, talked about current medical issues, such as teenage pregnancy, smoking and heart disease, and stressed some of the problems characteristic of the "non-system" of health care in the United States, including spiraling costs.

- Picking up on this point, Norma Swenson, Boston Women's Health Book Collective, went on to say that health care is an extremely profitable and virtually monopolistic business which does not focus on basic health issues such as the environment. Discussing

"Alternative Forms of Health Care," she described the genesis and development of the group known as the Boston Women's Health Book Collective, whose research ultimately emerged as the best selling and seminal book, *Our Bodies, Ourselves*. Ms. Swenson told the Chinese that the Collective had derived much of its inspiration from the revolutionary movement of the Chinese people.

- Belita Cowan, National Women's Health Network, began her discussion of "The United States Women's Health Movement" with a tribute to China's commitment to providing health care to its rural population, a commitment unmatched in the United States. She told of the growth of the women's health movement with the proliferation of woman-controlled clinics, self-help groups and rape crisis centers at the grassroots level. She also talked about the current trend away from surgical childbirth and toward out-of-hospital delivery.

- In contrast, Dr. Yen Renying indicated that women in China are encouraged to have their babies in clinics and hospitals as opposed to the home. She also described China's grassroots health care outreach which functions through the system of "barefoot doctors" in the countryside and "Red paramedics" in cities. On the whole, she said, health care costs are quite low and people working in state-run enterprises get free care.

- Tibetan delegate Cai Dan Zuo Ma spoke in particular of the great advances in health care in minority areas, where mortality rates have dropped dramatically as a result of the special priority efforts of the Chinese government.

- Responding to American questions about China's most pressing health problems, Yen Renying said that VD and infectious diseases have been virtually eliminated. One present effort lies in the area of population control. However, she pointed out, government policies differ for minority peoples, who are encouraged to have more children to prevent eventual decimation. In Tibet, Cai Dan Zuo Ma added, people generally do not want large families and need to be educated as to the necessity for this policy.

- Americans then asked if women in China, including minority women, do indeed have the right to decide for themselves the number of children and Dr. Yen replied in the affirmative.

Jeanne Barnett, Observer-reporter; Women's Studies Program, George Washington University; Yen Renying, Physician; Director of the Nl Hospital affiliated with the Peking Medical College; Julia Lear, Deputy Director, Community Hospital Program, Georgetown University Medical School.

- Americans also were very interested in learning something about the role of men in family planning and Dr. Yen explained that birth control remains largely a female responsibility, particularly in the countryside where the IUD is the preferred method. Americans also asked about the male pill but Dr. Yen indicated that it is still in the experimental stage.

WOMEN AND EDUCATION

- Gladys Hardy of the National Institute of Education presented an "Overview of the American Education System," first describing the power of the educational dream as it has always affected Americans, that is that education for its own sake and for its practical value is seen as the central vehicle for the improvement of society and the attainment of the good life. She described the diversity of formal educational institutions and programs that function, for the most part, under local control.

- Anne Firor Scott of Duke University in discussing the "History of Education for Women in the United States," pointed out that women, first excluded from educational institutions and activities, eventually gained acceptance and admission, particularly into institutions of higher education as the need for trained teachers increased.

- Bernice Sandler, Association of American Colleges, who talked about the "Status of Women in Education Today," described contemporary discriminatory practices against women in curricula, athletics and employment and the limitations of legislation passed to overcome such practices.

- Florence Howe, editor of the "Women's Studies Newsletter,"

Cai Dan Zuo Ma, Deputy Director, Bureau of Culture, Tibetan Autonomous Region.

described the purpose of "Women's Studies Programs in the United States:" (1) to raise the consciousness of women about their history; (2) to compensate for the absence of women in the curriculum by providing courses about women; (3) to increase the amount of research on women; (4) to restore to the general culture the history and achievements of women; and (5) to transform the mainstream curriculum to include women as well as men. At the present time, she reported that there are 15 thousand courses on women's studies in the nation and 310 programs, of which 100 offer degrees. Eighty offer the B.A., 20 the M.A. and 6 the Ph.D. There are also 21 research centers in women's studies.

- The Chinese noted the importance of the work accomplished in the last 10 years in the United States by those interested in women's studies and the ongoing importance of women's studies to women in all nations. It was observed that in earlier times in China the activities of women were not adequately reported or included in historical accounts but that since 1949 more information on the contributions of women has been made available in history books and in school texts, particularly at the primary level. The ACWF is now collecting historical data on women to further enhance such efforts.

- The Chinese women reported the centrality of education to the modernization process in the PRC and consequently a subject of major interest to the ACWF. In 1950, they said, 80 percent of the 500 million Chinese people were illiterate, with the proportion of female illiterates much higher than that of males. Since that time, the ACWF has directed a variety of literacy training and other educational programs especially designed for women and coupled with the increase in general education, they believe that the illiteracy rate has decreased considerably. Elementary and secondary education are now almost universal, they said, and 600 thousand of the 900 million are now studying at the university level. Television and radio are major means of promoting general education and vocational training.

WOMEN AND EMPLOYMENT

- Donna Shalala, Department of Housing and Urban Development, speaking on "Women in Government and Politics," made the point that women make up half of all government employees but are clustered in the lowest paying jobs. The problem and the challenge is to get women into high-paying powerful positions, perhaps by changing the criteria by which people are hired and by electing more women to high office.

- Power in foreign policy is almost exclusively white and male, declared Julia Bloch, International Communication Agency, in her discussion of "Women in International Affairs." The predominant view over the years has been that women really shouldn't be foreign service officers. The situation is improving, however, largely because women have legally challenged discriminatory policies. Today, 10 percent of the foreign service corps is female but only 3 percent are at the top echelons.

- "Women in Pink and Blue Collar Jobs" was the subject of Joan Goodin, National Commission on Working Women, as she discussed the 80 percent of working women employed in sub-professional jobs. Fifty-six percent of all women over 16 work, but patterns of occupational segregation place them in low status jobs where they receive less wages and benefits than do men. The need is to extend the idea of "equal pay for equal work" to "equal pay for work of equal value," and to provide access to education and training, child care, and internal support systems to combat occupational inequality.

- Following through on the theme of "Caring for the Children of Working Women," Muriel Tuteur, Director of Chicago's Amalgamated Day Care Center, explained that although there are 7 million children under 6 who have working mothers, there are places for only 1.6 million of them in licensed day care facilities. Over 40 percent of all mothers with preschool children work, and do so largely for economic reasons. The need is for good, affordable day care but to date neither government, employers nor most unions have been willing to come to grips with this critical national issue.

- Liao Bingying referred to the enormous increase in women in the labor force in China since 1949. For example, in Shanghai the number of working women has gone from 180 thousand to 800 thousand; in Tientsin from 20 thousand to 500 thousand; and in Peking from 4,800 to 770 thousand. Women have also moved into a

WINGSPREAD brief

Bernice Sandler, Executive Director, Project on the Status and Education of Women, Association of American Colleges; Gladys Chang Hardy, Deputy Director for Management, National Institute of Education, United States Department of Health, Education and Welfare.

Julia Chang Bloch, Deputy Director, Office of African Affairs, United States International Communication Agency.

Yen Renying, Physician; Director of the #1 Hospital affiliated with the Peking Medical College.

Huang Ganying, Delegation Leader; Vice Chairperson, All China Women's Federation.

Li Minhua, Professor, Research Fellow and Chairperson, Solid Mechanics Section, Institute of Mechanics, Chinese Academy of Sciences.

variety of occupations including heavy industry and into new industries such as petroleum and electronics. She discussed in particular her own factory, a heavy industry machine tool plant employing 7,400 workers, 34.8 percent of them women. Over three decades women were trained to fill a variety of positions and currently comprise 20 percent of all factory cadres. In the technical management area (as opposed to political and administrative management) 20 percent of those above the rank of deputy chief engineer are women and women are found at all levels of management, from shop-level to factory-level. The factory provides day care for nearly 600 children over the age of 2 months, at a fee equal to 7.5 percent of the combined wages of wife and husband. A dining hall eliminates the need for workers to return home for lunch.

An additional plenary session was arranged to discuss subjects not on the original agenda but which the Chinese delegates especially wished to learn about: the family, and the concerns and issues embodied in the women's movement in the United States.

THE FAMILY

- Anne Firor Scott started off with a brief retrospective look at the American family from its early status as a cohesive economic rural unit through its metamorphosis into a structured but loosely-knit urban social arrangement. "Everyone is talking in the United States about the breakdown of the family," she said, but concluded that the word "change" rather than the work "breakdown" best characterizes this very flexible human institution.

- This flexibility is evident in the many new arrangements which today are compatible with the idea of family, Florence Howe ex-

plained. The growing economic freedom of women has led to new options, including the option for later marriage, no marriage and no children. The traditional nuclear family where the wife stays home to look after the children now accounts for only 12 percent of all American families. There are two problem areas: divorced women who are displaced homemakers and young people who are unclear as to whether they wish to belong to families at all.

- Xu Xuehai asked why divorce is on the increase and Americans responded by saying that there is no single reason, although certainly women's increasing economic independence and a general change in values are factors. Muriel Tuteur pointed out that many parents no longer feel they must stay married for the sake of their children.

- In contrast, Chinese do regard divorce as harmful to children and remarks by several Chinese delegates suggested that all social forces contrive to preserve marriage. Li Minhua indicated that in China liberation for women has not led to divorce since they do not feel they must make a choice between career and family. Consequently the divorce rate is exceedingly low, even though divorce is a constitutional right. Huang Ganying mentioned a study conducted in Peking which showed that only 3 percent of every 100 couples had even considered divorce and that only 1 percent actually got a divorce in the end.

- In reply to questions from Americans about the issue of child custody, the consensus seemed to be that in the event of divorce children have the option to select the parent of choice. Most delegates agreed that usually children of divorced parents end up with the mother.

- Outlining Chinese views on the family, Xu Manqin stressed the importance of the family as the "basic cell of society." Harmonious marital relationships and a cooperative spirit between wife and husband are good for society and to this end, each partner should share the responsibilities for child rearing, home duties and a happy environment. Most families meet these standards, Xu Manqin maintained. One of the functions of the ACWF is to promote this ideal and to teach people how to achieve it.

- Xu Xuehai elaborated on the societal role of marriage: "Our whole society feels they have a responsibility to those who want to get married, and if you get married, society is responsible."

- Huang Ganying told the group that the "ACWF works to help out problem marriages" and receives many letters and visits from women with marital problems. At the level of its community organizations, the Federation works with both partners to try to solve the difficulty. Meng Zhongyun added that even outside the Federation, women work together to help couples having problems.

- Anne Firor Scott suggested here a basic cultural difference between Chinese and Americans in that Americans do not look to society to intervene in cases of marital discord, a practice that would be regarded as a breach of privacy. Catherine Cleary, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, added that "we don't recognize . . . that the society or state is really a party to this" kind of mediation.

ISSUES OF INTEREST

- The American delegates built their discussion around some of the major issues raised by the National Women's Conference held in Houston in 1977, issues which had previously emerged from grassroots meetings throughout the United States. These included equal pay for equal work and work of equal value, equal access to jobs and education, equal credit, child care needs, and abortion. The Americans explained many of the problems for women in these particular areas, elaborating on a number of points such as sex-stereotyping in textbooks, inequality in academic promotions and the problems of two-career families.

- Julia Bloch pointed out that despite the fact that the Equal Rights Amendment has not yet been ratified, women in America have achieved equality as far as the laws on the books are concerned. The problem is now enforcement of these laws.

- Xu Xuehai particularly wished to know about retirement ages in the United States and the income which retired persons can expect to receive. Donna Shalala explained the variations in a system which provides a base in the form of Social Security upon which a variety of private pension plans may or may not be built. "The women's movement is very concerned about the differential between what men get and what women get for the same number of years work," she said. In addition, women who are single and have never worked are not eligible for Social Security benefits.

- The Chinese posed further questions about the details of pension plans. Is Social Security the same for men and women? How much wages are deducted for Social Security? How much comes from the employer and how much from the person?

- Gladys Hardy asked the Chinese delegates "if they have the same sense of the need to struggle that we have in our society." "We have achieved equality of men and

women legally; and in terms of enforcement things are much better than they used to be," Huang Ganying replied. "But of course we cannot say that we have totally enforced these laws."

THE FRIENDSHIP TREE

Members of the American and Chinese delegations participated in a tree planting ceremony on the Wingspread grounds. In response to Rita Goodman's statement dedicating the tree to friendship between the women of the two countries, each participant added her shovelful of dirt to the planting of the evergreen. "With careful nurturing by the women of our two countries, I am sure our friendship will grow as sturdily as this tree which will symbolize the everlasting friendship between us," Huang Ganying said. The evergreen, co-operatively planted by Chinese and American women, represented the ideals that motivated and inspired the Wingspread Conference — friendship and understanding.

Zhu Yiyun and Lin Shangzhen, both Deputy Section Chiefs, International Liaison Department, All China Women's Federation.

In many practical ways and in the various settings made possible by the facilities of Wingspread, these ideals were nourished and realized. The formal programs facilitated the presentation and exchange of information on the preselected topics. It was informally during meals and other interludes in the planned programs that equally significant exchanges occurred. Discussions in small groups covered a wide range of topics from families, child care, the double burdens assumed by women of home and work responsibilities, and divorce, to labor unions, working conditions, the sex segregation of the labor force, and the political participation of women.

Each woman present gained new information and insights concerning the lives and aspirations of people in another culture. Through each of these individuals, new perceptions will be shared with others.

PARTICIPANTS

Delegation Members

Huang Ganying	Delegation Leader; Vice Chairperson, All China Women's Federation (ACWF)
Yen Renying	Physician; Director of the #1 Hospital affiliated with the Peking Medical College
Cai Dan Zuo Ma	Deputy Director, Bureau of Culture, Tibetan Autonomous Region
Li Minhua	Professor, Research Fellow and Chairperson, Solid Mechanics Section, Institute of Mechanics, Chinese Academy of Sciences
Meng Zhongyun	Chairperson, Hobei Province Women's Federation
Xu Xuehai	Vice Director, International Liaison Department, ACWF
Liao Bingying	Deputy Chief, Chief Engineer, Peking #1 Machine Tool Factory
Wang Jinfeng	Reporter, *People's Daily*
Xu Manqin	Section Chief, International Liaison Department, ACWF
Lin Shangzhen	Deputy Section Chief, International Liaison Department, ACWF
Zhu Yiyun	Deputy Section Chief, International Liaison Department, ACWF

Escorts

Alison Stilwell Cameron	Board member, National Committee on U.S.-China Relations
Jan Berris	Tour Coordinator and Program Director, National Committee on U.S.-China Relations
June Mei Karen Steffan	Interpreters
Zhang Aihua	PRC Embassy Representative
Jeanne Barnett Charlotte Conable	Observers-reporters; Women's Studies Program, George Washington University

American Participants

Julia Chang Bloch	Deputy Director, Office of African Affairs, International Communication Agency
Catherine Cleary	Adjunct Professor, School of Business Administration, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee
Belita Cowan	Executive Director, National Women's Health Network
Joan Goodin	Executive Director, National Commission on Working Women
Gladys Chang Hardy	Deputy Director for Management, National Institute of Education, U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare
Florence Howe	Professor of Humanities, State University of New York/College at Old Westbury
Julia Lear	Deputy Director, Community Hospital Program, Georgetown University Medical School
Bernice Sandler	Executive Director, Project on the Status and Education of Women, Association of American Colleges
Anne Firor Scott	Professor, Department of History, Duke University
Donna Shalala	Assistant Secretary for Policy Development and Research, U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development
Norma Swenson	Boston Women's Health Book Collective
Muriel Tuteur	Director, Amalgamated Day Care Center; Coalition of Labor Union Women

The tree planting ceremony

WINGSPREAD

THE JOHNSON FOUNDATION

The building Frank Lloyd Wright called Wingspread, situated on a rolling prairie site just north of Racine, Wisconsin, was designed in 1938 as a residence for the Johnson family. In 1960, through the gift of Mr. and Mrs. H. F. Johnson, it became the headquarters of The Johnson Foundation and began its career as an educational conference center.

In the years since, it has been the setting for many conferences and meetings dealing with subjects of regional, national, and international interest. It is the hope of the Foundation's trustees that Wingspread will take its place increasingly as a national institution devoted to the free exchange of ideas among people.

The rolling expanse of the Midwestern prairies was considered a natural setting for Wingspread. In the limitless earth the architect envisioned a freedom and movement. The name Wingspread was an expression of the nature of the house, reflecting aspiration through spread wings - a symbol of soaring inspiration.

The Johnson Foundation encourages the examination of a variety of problems facing the Midwest, the Nation, and mankind. In the belief that responsible analyses and proposals should reach a substantial audience, The Johnson Foundation assists in the publication of various papers and reports. Publication, of course, does not imply approval.

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